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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ADANA 0044

SIPDIS

SENSTITUE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, NEA/NGA AND DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM TU SY IZ ADANA

SUBJECT: INCREASING UNREST IN SE TURKEY

11. (SBU) Summary: Imprisoned PKK/KADEK leader Abdullah Ocalan has been denied access to lawyers and family by the GOT since November 2002. In SE Turkey, reaction against this enforced isolation has been angry. There have been demonstrations, hunger strikes, and Molotov-cocktail threats. Kurdish interlocutors believe the prolongation of Ocalan's isolation has the potential to set off a new wave of violence. Within the past three weeks, perhaps coincidentally, there have been two armed clashes between GOT security forces and the PKK. End summary.

Ocalan's Isolation Provokes Increased Tension

- 12. (U) Press reports -not denied by the GOT -indicate imprisoned PKK/KADEK leader Abdullah Ocalan has not met with his lawyers or family members since November 2002. The GOT has offered the explanation that inclement weather has prevented boats from reaching Imrali Island in the Sea of Marmara, where Ocalan has been incarcerated ever since his capture in 1999. This explanation is widely dismissed as bogus by Kurdish representatives.
- 13. (U) Starting in December 2002, anger about the enforced isolation of Ocalan has been bubbling up in SE Turkey. We have reports from press and consular contacts of nearly 50 demonstrations or other incidents since December 18. They have included public rallies, marches, slogan-chanting, proclamations, bonfires and tire-burnings, roadblocks, and hunger strikes The venues have been all over the SE: Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, Saniurfa, Van, Bingol, Mersin, Adana, Gaziantep, Hakkari, Agri, and Mardin. Police, in some cases using truncheons and armored personnel-carriers, have made numerous arrests, including students and DEHAP members. In at least one case, police claimed to have found Molotov-cocktails that were being readied for use. In some of the demonstrations, protest against a possible U.S. strike against Iraq has been mingled with the call for an end to Ocalan's isolation.

Tanks Return to the Streets

14. (SBU) In recent travel in the Consular district, both Poleconoff and Principal Officer heard simmering rage from Kurdish interlocutors about the continued isolation of Ocalan. More than one interlocutor remarked the situation even had the potential to trigger armed attacks by PKK/KADEK elements. In the city of Diyarbakir, at the end of January, Principal Officer observed the armored personnel-carriers and tanks moving about and learned that some sections of the city had been cordoned off for security purposes. The security presence was the more visible than at any time she could recall over the past two years.

GOT-PKK Armed Clashes Escalate

- 15. (SBU) It is worth noting that the anger over Ocalan's isolation has coincided with two GOT-PKK armed clashes within the past three weeks. The first, near Lice in Diyarbakir Province, took place on January 16; the second, on January 27 in Idol in Sirnak province. In the Lice skirmish, one Turkish soldier and an unspecified number of PKK fighters were killed. In Idol, press reports indicate the PKK forces started the engagement, which left one Turkish soldier dead. If so, this would represent the first time in a long while that the PKK has mounted an offnsie operation.
- 16. (SBU) Consulate contacts in the Kurdish community agrees that the temperature seems t be risng Te iyarbakir B Asocatin resdet tld s hatKuds in prpoteousth GO explaation hat Oclan ha been nable o reciv viit frm amiy embrs or lawyers for the past nine weksbeause of "weather". He opined that some elements could perceive Ocalan's isolation as a provocation to incite violence and thereby provide a pretext for the GOT to hit back A DEHAP member from Sirnak offered us the view that ordinary people find it very hard to see Ocalan's enforced isolation as anything other than a violation of his human rights. (Note: Amnesty International has now spoken out against Ocalan's isolation, too. End note.) A human rights contact of ours said that Ocalan's health was a matter of genuine concern - if Ocalan were to fall seriously ill or die in custody, it would be easy to imagine a renewal of suicide bomb attacks, as occurred shortly after Ocalan's arrest in Kenya. A former president of the Batman Bar Association emphasized that if the GOT, in denying Ocalan access to his lawyers and family members, is seen to be reneging on its promise to uphold Copenhagen Criteria and EU norms, it will dash many hopes in the region.
- 17. (SBU) Comment: Whatever the real reason PKK/KADEK leader Abdullah Ocalan has been denied access to visitors since November 2002, our contacts blame the GOT for renewed anger and tension and tanks in the streets. End Comment.

HOLTZ